

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT,SP
SUBJECT: PCE LEGALIZATION: SOME IMPLICATIONS

SUMMARY: GIVEN THE THRUST AND DIRECTION OF THE SPANISH
TRANSITION, THE LEGALIZATION OF THE PCE WAS INEVITABLE, AND IT
IS PREFERABLE THAT IT CAME BEFORE EFORE ELECTIONS RATHER THAN LATER.
LEGALIZATION, ALTHOUGH NOT ACCOMPLISHED WITHOUT A PRICE,
REMOVES ONE MORE CHARGE WHICH COULD HAVE BEEN LEVELED TO IMPUGN
THE ELECTIONS AND AT LAST WILL SUBJECT THE PCE TO THE SAME
SCRUTINY APPLIED TO OTHER SIGNIFICANT PARTIES. IT WILL NOT
ALTER THE NONVIOLENT, EUROCOMMUNIST APPROACH OF THE PCE, WHERE
SANTIAGO CARRILLO, STILL ITS UNQUESTIONED LEADER, HAS HIS EYE
ON LONG-TERM GOALS AND WOULD BE UNLIKELY TO JEOPARDIZE THEM
THROUGH PRECIPITOUS BEHAVIOR IN THE SHORT TERM. END SUMMARY.
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1. BENEFITS...THE GOVT'S LEGALIZATION OF THE PCE, FOR WHCIH
THE GROUND WAS WELL PREPARED AND WHICH HAS BEEN GREETED WITH
EQUANIMITY ON THE PART OF THE SPANISH PUBLIC AND A SIGN OF
RELIEF BY MOST OF THE POLITICAL CLASS EXCEPT THE FRAGA-LED
ALIANZA POPULAR AND THOSE FURTHER TO THE RIGHT, CONSTITUTES
ANOTHER IMPORTANT STEP TOWARD THE NORMALIZATION OF SPANISH POLITICAL

LIFE AND THE EVOLUTION OF A WESTERN-STYLE DEMOCRACY. LEGALIZATION DOES CONFER BENEFITS ON THE PCE. IT BESTOWS A MEASURE OF DEMOCRATIC LEGITIMACY, WHICH WILL NOW ENABLE THE PCE TO IMPLEMENT ITS "POLITICS OF REASSURANCE" MORE EFFECTIVELY--AND IN THIS RESPECT IT HAS AN OVER-ALL COST. HOWEVER, IT ALSO GIVES THE PCE A MORE TANGIBLE STAKE IN THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, HAS BENEFITED THE NON-COMMUNIST OPPOSITION AND THE POLITICAL TRANSITION GENERALL BY:

--REMOVING A LONG-STANDING DISTRACTION FOR THE TRADITIONAL OPPOSITION AND AN APPLE OF DISCORD BETWEEN OPPOSITION AND GOVT THAT MIGHT HAVE DETRACTED FROM THE LEGITIMACY OF THE COMING ELECTIONS; AND

--MADING THE PCE VULNERABLE TO POLITICAL CRITICISM FROM WHICH ITS ENFORCED ILLEGALITY SHIELDED IT, HOPEFULLY CONSTITUTING THE LAST STEP IN BREAKING THE COMMUNISTS' LINGERING EMBRACE OF THE TRADITIONAL OPPOSITION, AND CLEARLY REVEALING THE PCE'S PRESUMED ELECTORAL WEAKNESS.

2. ...AND COSTS. LEGALIZATION, HOWEVER, WAS NOT ACCOMPLISHED WITHOUT A PRICE. THE DECISION FURTHER ALIENATED THE HARD-LINE RIGHT WHICH IS CAPABLE OF ATTEMPTING A PHYSICAL CONFRONTATION WITH THE COMMUNISTS OR A PERPETRATING AN ACT OF VIOLENCE AGAINST PCE LEADERS. THIS, TOGETHER WITH POSSIBLE ACTS OF INDISCIPLINE BY PCE MEMBERS, OBVIUSLY COULD BE POLARIZING AND MIGHT UNDERMINE THE ENTIRE PROCESS. HOWEVER THE GOVT IS MAKING PROGRESS IN KEEPING THE ULTRA-RIGHT IN LINE AND THE PCE HAS THUS FAR DEMONSTRATED IMPRESSIVE INTERAL DISCIPLINE. LEGALIZATION ALSO PROVIDES FRAGA'S "ALIANZA POPULAR" (AP), ALREADY WEARING ITS ANTI-COMMUNISM ON ITS SLEEVE, WITH A CONFIDENTIAL

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CONVENIENT VEHICLE FOR BOTH LAMBASTING THE GOVT AND PLAYING ON REAL FEARS ABOUT THE COMMUNISTS, BORN OF THE CIVIL WAR EXPERIENCE, WHICH PREVAIL IN SOME SECTORS OF THE POPULATION. THIS, IN TURN, COULD LEAD TO A STRENGTHENING OF AP'S ELECTORAL APPEAL AT THE EXPENSE OF THE CENTER, ALTHOUGH WE JUDGE AT WRITING THAT THIS WOULD NOT BE SIGNIFICANT.

3. LIKELY PCE BEHAVIOR. THE PARTY PROBABLY WILL STUDIOUSLY AVOID DOING ANYTHING TO PROVOKE ATTACKS ON IT BY POLITICAL GROUPS OF THE CENTER AND DEMOCRATIC LEFT. THE PCE LEADERSHIP APPEARS TO SEE THE PARTY'S TASK TO BE THE CONSOLIDATION OF ITS POLITICAL ACCEPTABILITY BY CONTINUING ITS PRE-ELECTORAL TACTIC OF PATIENTLY REASSURING THE SPANISH ELECTORATE (AND MILITARY), THROUGH ITS CONDUCT AS WELL AS ITS RHETORIC, THAT THE PCE IS A RESPONSIBLE AND EFFECTIVE PARTY WHICH ADVOCATES MODERATION AND SUPPORTS DEMOCRACY. TO THE EXTENT THAT THE PCE ADHERES TO THIS LINE, FULL-FLEDGED ATTACKS ON IT FROM MOST MAJOR GROUPS ARE LIKELY TO BE INFREQUENT, SINCE THE CENTER (INCLUDING THE GOVT), THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT AND MOST OF THE

MEDIA VIEW FRAGA'S AP, NOT THE PCE, AS THE PRINCIPAL SHORT-TERM ADVERSARY.

4. ELECTIONS AND BEYOND. THE PCE APPEARS RESIGNED TO SHORT-TERM REVERSES, CONCENTRATING INSTEAD ON LONGER TERM OBJECTIVES, SUCH AS THE SUSTAINED GROWTH OF ITS ELECTORAL BASE, INCREASINGLY EFFECTIVE PENETRATION OF THE LOWER AND MIDDLE CLASSES, AND CONSOLIDATION OF ITS LEADERSHIP POSITION IN THE LABOR SECTOR. THE LEADERSHIP PORBABLY REALIZES THAT THE USE OF THE PCE LABEL IN THE FIRST ELECTION WILL LIKELY CONSTITUTE A DISADVANTAGE, AND IT SEEMS TO ACCEPT THAT THE PARTY IS UNLIKELY TO PLACE MORE THAN A HANDFUL OF ITS LEADERS IN THE CONSITITUENT ASSEMBLY. IT PROBABLY WILL PRESENT ANYTHING ABOVE 10 PERCENT OF THE POPULAR VOTE AS A VICTORY, WHILE ANYTHING LESS THA A TOTAL OF 7-8 PERCENT COULD BE POTENTIALLY TROUBLESOME INTERNALLY. THE PARTY IS CERTAIN ALREADY TO BE LOOKING AHEAD TO MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS, WHICH ARE TO BE HELD BEFORE THE END
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OF THE YEAR, AND BEYOND. AFTER THE JUNE ELECTIONS, WHEN GOVT AND OPPOSITION BEGIN TO ADDRESS HARD BREAD AND BUTTER ISSUES, SUCH AS THE MUCH TALKED ABOUT "SOCIAL PACT," THE COMMUNISTS MAY WELL BE PUSHED INTO A MORE COMBATIVE MODE. BUT THEIR SPOTTY ELECTORAL PERFORMANCE WOULD BE ALL TOO REVEALING OF THEIR RELATIVE POLITICAL WEIGHT AND THE POLITICAL DISTANCE YET TO BE TRAVELED, AND WOULD LIKELY CAUSE THEM TO CONTINUE TO LEAN TO THE SIDE OF CAUTION. STABLER

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